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SUBJECT: FALLOUT OVER AIRPORT VIOLENCE CONTINUES

11. (SBU) The April 26 clash between Pan-Green and Pan-Blue radicals at Taipei's Chiang Kai-shek (CKS) International Airport over KMT Chairman Lien Chan's visit to Mainland China continues to dominate the Taiwan media, attracting almost as much attention as Lien's ongoing visit itself. The violence erupted despite the presence of some 3,500 National Police Agency (NPA) officers around the airport. The Chen government has expressed outrage and embarrassment over the violence and the police failure. Premier Frank Hsieh stated the violence has tarnished Taiwan's international image and pledged a full investigation. Both media and legislators have also harshly criticized the NPA, and there were media reports that few of the airport police officers had received riot training. Hsieh announced April 27 that NPA Aviation Police Bureau Chief Chen Juei-tien had been relieved of his duties because of his failure to direct the police on the scene to quell the violence. Protesters from both camps have vowed to return to CKS airport when Lien returns on May 3, but NPA officials have announced that police officers with anti-riot training will be present and will not allow protesters to enter the terminal or the demonstrations to turn violent.

12. (SBU) Police have started rounding up alleged ringleaders of the violence with ten arrested so far. Prosecutors also notified three deep-"Green" Legislative Yuan (LY) members as well as popular talk show host and Taiwan Solidarity Union (TSU) supporter Wang Ben-hu that their activities on April 26 were under investigation. Police have charged Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) legislator Wang Shih-chien with instigating the violence and DPP legislator Hsu Kuo-yung and TSU Caucus Leader Lo Chih-ming with fueling the clashes. Lo

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Chih-ming resigned as TSU Caucus Leader and Minister of Interior Su Jia-chyuan offered his resignation, which was refused by Premier Hsieh. Both ruling DPP and TSU leaders formally apologized for the violent actions of their supporters. In his apology, DPP Caucus Whip Lai Ching-teh vowed to discipline any party members or public office holders found to have engaged in unlawful activities.

13. (SBU) Several members of the ethnic Mainlander Bamboo United Gang caught on camera violently beating Pan-Green demonstrators were also detained. Leaders of the pro-unification KMT New Party faction, which brought pro-Lien demonstrators to the airport, denied any links with the Bamboo United Gang, which had participated in violent anti-DPP clashes after the March 20, 2004, presidential election. New Party Chairman Yok Mu-ming, however, was publicly embarrassed when a photograph of him at the airport with well-known Bamboo Gang leader Wang Lan surfaced in the press.

14. (SBU) Comment: The violence that erupted over Lien's visit is particularly damaging to the DPP government, which has tried in recent days to portray the Lien visit in a positive light, after earlier acerbic criticism. The shock over the violence in Taiwan has overshadowed the local coverage of the early stages of the Lien visit, and further protests could stoke additional animosity between Pan-Green and Pan-Blue camps in the LY. Images of the CKS airport violence broadcast worldwide on April 26 also handed the PRC a propaganda coup, portraying Taiwan as violently divided and unstable. The CKS scenes, on the other hand, could also reinforce pressure from a public tired of unification and independence extremes to move to the pragmatic middle ground in support of the status quo. President Chen's quick condemnation of the clashes suggests he might try to use public revulsion to claim he is seeking moderation and cooperation with the opposition after Lien returns from Beijing.

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